

What is claimed is:

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1. A method of operating a telephone answering device connected to a telephone line, the method comprising:

answering an incoming call on the telephone line;

playing a general outgoing message on the telephone line;

and

responsive to receipt on the telephone line of a code associated with a special message storage location, playing a message stored in the special message storage location on the telephone line.

2. The method as recited in claim 1 further comprising, responsive to expiration of a predetermined period of time without receipt on the telephone line of the code associated with the special message storage location, recording an incoming message received on the telephone line.

3. The method as recited in claim 1 further comprising, subsequent to playing the message stored in the special message storage location on the telephone line, recording an incoming message received on the telephone line.

4. The method as recited in claim 1 further comprising, subsequent to playing the message stored in the special message storage location, storing an incoming message received on the telephone line in the special message storage location.

5. The method as recited in claim 4 wherein more than one message is stored in the special message storage location, the method further comprising enabling a caller to select one or more of the more than one message to be played on the telephone line.

6. The method as recited in claim 1 further comprising, subsequent to playing the message stored in the special message storage location, replacing the message stored in the special message storage location with an incoming message.

7. The method as recited in claim 1 further comprising, subsequent to the playing a general outgoing message on the telephone line, playing a special tone on the telephone line if a special outgoing message has previously been recorded.

8. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the code comprises at least one dual-tone multi-frequency tone.

9. A telephone answering device connectable to a telephone line comprising:

means for answering an incoming call on the telephone line;

means for playing a general outgoing message on the telephone line; and

means responsive to receipt on the telephone line of a code associated with a special message storage location for playing a message stored in the special message storage location on the telephone line.

10. The telephone answering device as recited in claim 9 further comprising means responsive to expiration of a predetermined period of time without receipt on the telephone line of the code associated with the special message storage location for recording an incoming message received on the telephone line.

11. The telephone answering device as recited in claim 9 further comprising means for recording an incoming message received on the telephone line subsequent to playing the messages stored in the special message storage location on the telephone line.

12. The telephone answering device as recited in claim 9 further comprising means for storing an incoming message received on the telephone line in the special message storage location subsequent to playing the message stored in the special message storage location.

13. The telephone answering device as recited in claim 12 wherein more than one message is stored in the special message storage location and wherein the telephone answering device further comprises means for enabling a caller to select among the more than one message to be played on the telephone line.

14. The telephone answering device as recited in claim 9 further comprising means for replacing the message stored in the special message storage location with an incoming message subsequent to playing the message stored in the special message storage location.

15. The telephone answering device as recited in claim 9 further comprising means for playing a special tone on the telephone line if a special outgoing message has previously been recorded subsequent to the playing a general outgoing message on the telephone line.

16. The telephone answering device as recited in claim
9 wherein the code comprises at least one dual-tone multi-
frequency tone.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

17. A telephone answering device comprising:

a control circuit connectable to a telephone line; and
a storage medium connected to the control circuit that
stores a general outgoing message, a special outgoing message
and incoming messages, wherein, responsive to receipt of an
incoming call on the telephone line, the control circuit
answers the call, plays the general outgoing message on the
telephone line, and, responsive to receipt of a code
corresponding to the special outgoing message, plays the
special outgoing message on the telephone line.

18. The telephone answering device as recited in claim
17 wherein the control circuit causes a special tone to be
played subsequent to playing the general outgoing message if
the special outgoing message is stored on the storage medium.

19. The telephone answering device as recited in claim
17 wherein the control circuit causes an incoming message to
be stored on the storage medium subsequent to playing the
special outgoing message on the telephone line.

20. The telephone answering device as recited in claim 17 wherein, subsequent to playing the general outgoing message and responsive to passage of a predetermined period of time without receipt of a special code, the control circuit causes an incoming message to be stored on the storage medium.

21. The telephone answering device as recited in claim 17 wherein the code comprises at least one dual-tone multi-frequency tone.

22. The telephone answering device as recited in claim 17 wherein the storage medium comprises random access memory.

23. The telephone answering device as recited in claim 17 wherein the storage medium comprises at least one magnetic tape.

24. The telephone answering device as recited in claim 17 wherein the storage medium comprises a digital storage medium.

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25. A method of programming a telephone answering device connectable to a telephone line, the method comprising:
recording a general outgoing message;
inputting a code; and
recording a special outgoing message associated with the code such that upon receipt of an incoming call on the telephone line, the telephone answering device answers the incoming call, plays the general outgoing message on the telephone line, and, responsive to receipt on the telephone line of the code, plays the special outgoing message on the telephone line.

26. The method as recited in claim 25 wherein the code comprises at least one dual-tone multi-frequency tone.

27. The method as recited in claim 26 wherein the step of inputting a code further comprises inputting the code using a keypad of the telephone answering device.

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28. A method of operating a telephone answering device connected to a telephone line, the method comprising:

answering an incoming call on the telephone line;
playing a general outgoing message on the telephone line;
subsequent to playing the general outgoing message, determining whether a code corresponding to a special outgoing message has been received on the telephone line; and responsive to a determination that the code corresponding to the special outgoing message has been received on the telephone line, playing the special outgoing message on the telephone line.

29. The method as recited in claim 28 further comprising recording an incoming message received on the telephone line after playing the special outgoing message on the telephone line.

30. The method as recited in claim 28 further comprising, subsequent to playing the general outgoing message, determining whether a predetermined time period has expired and, responsive to expiration of the predetermined time period, recording an incoming message received on the telephone line.

31. The method as recited in claim 28 further comprising, subsequent to the playing of the general outgoing message on the telephone line, playing a special tone on the telephone line if the special outgoing message has previously been recorded.

32. The method as recited in claim 28 wherein the code comprises at least one dual-tone multi-frequency tone.